VISTA Volunteers Face Job Loss Over Protest

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By Gerald Grant
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Four VISTA volunteers were threatened with loss of their jobs after they wrote to the White House saying they were planning a march here to protest the Vietnam war.

The young recruits in the Federal antipoverty program were summoned to Washington last week when the Office of Economic Opportunity learned they were sponsoring the march under the VISTA banner.

A spokesman for OEO said yesterday that the volunteers were told that they could espouse any cause they wished as private individuals but that they could not identify VISTA with controversial viewpoints.

They were told they would be asked to resign or could be fired if they did not do so, added the spokesman, James F. Kelleher, deputy director of public affairs.

The volunteers, who work in New York in a Harlem housing program, were also warned that they could not use their apartment as a headquarters for their protest activities.

The apartment, which is rented by two of the volunteers out of a monthly allowance provided by VISTA, is paid for with Federal funds and is identified with the program, Kelleher declared.

He said it was not an ordinary apartment but was a kind of outpost from which the volunteers worked in the community.

VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) is a kind of domestic Peace Corps, furnishing volunteers to a variety of social and welfare programs.

The volunteers — John A. Kirkley, 21, Robert D. Mitchell, 21, Richard L. Adler, 20, and Larry Cripe, 22—agreed to drop the VISTA name from their efforts.

But they were not convinced that they should refuse to use their apartments for their outside activities. In a telephone interview yesterday, Kirkley said they might see a lawyer about that point.

However, they changed the name of their Washington march from "VISTAs for Peace" to "Poverty Workers for Peace." They hope to have 5000 participants here in a demonstration planned for Feb. 26.